

Blaze Blackens 2,500 Acres

Lightning-set fire burned along the easterly and westerly slopes of Mt. Diablo this morning in a crackling horseshoe of flame that raged across the dry grass and brush.

Over 600 fire fighters with bulldozers and 50 fire trucks stopped the northward advance of the flame by cutting a fire break from Clayton southeast in a line parallel to Marsh Creek Road.

Persons in a dozen houses in the Russellman Park area near Marsh Creek Road were evacuated, but the fire burned past on the hills above.

By this morning, 2,500 acres were blackened.

"We had the fire pretty well contained on the Clayton side last

night," said Chief Inspector Darrell Harguth. But the easterly and westward branches of the fire burned largely uncontrolled through the night on steep terrain inaccessible to the fire fighters.

Harguth said to buildings in the paths of those fires were in immediate danger.

"We've operated a running attack at the lower elevations to block the fire before it reached inhabited areas," Harguth said. "When the fire gets to the right point on the other side, we'll get there to meet it."

A lightning strike on the Eagle Peak area between Mt. Diablo State Park and Clayton set the fire off shortly before 5 p.m. yesterday, wit-

nesses said. There was little wind, and the fire spread in all directions, fanned by its own rushing wave of heat.

"Wind is forecast for today, and we're worried about that," Harguth said.

Six fire retardant bombers were committed to the fire. Some dropped their swathes of red chemicals on the blaze last night, and more began swooping over the ridges at dawn today.

The fire burned between the 1,500 and 3,000 foot levels, witnesses said.

Besides curving around the slopes of Mt. Diablo, the blaze moved slowly up towards the peak.

Streaks of dry lightning flashing to earth without rain set off fires throughout Northern California and at other points in Contra Costa County.

Three other fires behind Moraga and Las Trampas Ridge kept several hundred fire fighters busy.

"There must be 40 or 50 fires going all over the state. Some of them are just an acre or so and we're getting them out, but others are getting out of hand," said a dispatcher at the California Division of Forestry headquarters in Sacramento last night.

Fires consumed brush in Bollinger and Hunsaker Canyons in the early evening, but fire fighting bombers pulled off the Mt. Diablo blaze "knocked them down pretty quickly," a Moraga Fire Protection District spokesman said, and they were reported under control later in the evening.

The Las Trampas Ridge fire drew a hundred men from CDF, the Contra Costa Consolidated Fire District, East Bay Regional Parks District, San Ramon Fire Department, Danville Fire Protection District and the Moraga district. They held the fire to 35 acres.

The lightning also touched off two blazes in the extreme northern section of Los Padres National Forest in

Monterey County.

In the Marble Mountains 12 miles east of Big Sur, 50 men battled in the dark to hold back a fire which had consumed more than 50 acres by late last night. The fire was considered serious but fairly accessible.

A more remote fire 10 miles to the south burned out of control for hours last night with no manpower to fight it in the Ventana Primitive Area. There are no roads near the site, but the Forestry Division planned to put 250 men and 8 air tankers to work on the blaze at daybreak.

A military helicopter was sent in to several campgrounds to evacuate campers thought to be in danger from the two fires, but only one man was found and flown out. Roads and campgrounds throughout the area were closed to the public.

Further south in the Los Padres National Forest, two fires which began Sunday were still burning, but the fire in a remote area 10 miles north of Santa Barbara was declared contained at 7 p.m. It had burned over 50 acres.

Another fire 10 miles north of Lake Cachuma was still out of con-

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trol however, and 1,000 acres of brush had been destroyed. The fire was only 50 per cent contained last night, and moving southwest toward a few summer homes about two miles away.

"It's sort of fingering around and moving slowly," said a CDF spokesman, and the homes were not thought to be in immediate danger.

The fire which burned 3,400 acres near St. Helena in the Napa Valley was brought under control yesterday, and men and equipment were quickly sent to lightning-caused fires which popped out in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties in mid-evening.

Toward midnight, lightning was

reported setting off fires further north in Mendocino and Klamath National Forests. Other lightning struck as far south as Fresno. More fires began in Tehama, Glenn, Lake and Butte Counties.

"It's impossible to tell right now which are the major fires and which are the ones that have potential," said the Sacramento dispatcher. "We just keeping sending men from one to another as they become available."

He said a lightning-caused fire had burned over 150 acres near Auburn, and several "medium-sized" fires were in progress around Oroville. No structures were threatened and no injuries reported at midnight, in any of the fires around the state.

High Winds Feared

Blaze Is Out of Control

By LARRY SPEARS and LES SIPIES

Unchecked, lightning-set fire burned the northern and eastern slopes of Mt. Diablo this morning after searing more than 3,000 acres of grass and brush.

"Wind is forecast for today, and we're worried about that," he said.

Six fire retardant tanker-bombers are committed to the fire. Some dropped their swathes of red chemicals on the blaze last evening, and bombers and four helicopters looped over the ridges this morning.

The fire lighted the night skies

"I don't think we can control it until tonight," said Bill Hoehman, a fire boss for the state Division of Forestry.

"We have no hopes of containment until the south side burns

Jennie Brammeyer and her mother, Mrs. Twila Brammeyer, saw the lightning bolts flash into the dry hills shortly before 5 p.m. as they looked out the windows of their residence on Kirker Pass Road between Clayton and Pittsburg.

They said three small spots of fires burst into flame after a light-

through the brush and begins to hit roads," said Harry Harp, another CDF official.

At 9:30 p.m., fire fighters said the blaze was 10 per cent contained.

More than 600 fire fighters with 22 bulldozers and 80 fire trucks stopped the Mitchell Canyon fire's northward advance by slashing fire breaks from Clayton southeast in a line parallel to Marsh Creek Road.

A lightning strike on the Eagle Peak area between Mt. Diablo State Park and Clayton ignited the fire shortly before 5 p.m. yesterday, witnesses said. There was little wind, and the fire spread in all directions, fanned by its own rushing wave of heat.

Persons in a dozen houses in the Russellman Park area near Marsh Creek Road were evacuated, but the fire burned past on the hills above.

Fire fighters first concentrated on saving about 40 homes in the Mitchell Creek Park area at the upper end of Mitchell Canyon Road leading south from Clayton towards the mountain.

Ranchers and fire fighters drove horses away from the blazing grasslands.

"We had the fire pretty well contained on the Clayton side last night," said Chief Inspector Darrell Harguth of the Contra Costa County Consolidated Fire District.

But the easterly and southwestern branches of the fire raged uncontrolled through the night on steep terrain inaccessible to fire fighters.

Harguth said no buildings in the paths of those fires were in immediate danger, although Assistant Chief Dick Starr of the consolidated fire district led a task force to the top of Mt. Diablo shortly before 8 a.m. today to protect a radio installation.

Besides curving around the slopes, the fire moved up to the peak, its hottest part roaring into the Mt. Diablo state game refuge. At 9 a.m., parts of the blaze had burned over the top.

The fire raged above 1,500 feet, witnesses said, crackling easterly toward Marsh Creek Road and Morgan Territory Road.

Firemen called from Contra Costa County, city departments and districts joined state and consolidated fire fighters on the lines, which spread six to eight miles.

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Diablo Fire Rages Anew

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"We've operated a running attack on the lower elevations to block the fire before it could reach inhabited areas, Harguth said. "When the fire gets to the right point on the other side, we'll get there to meet it."

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Six fire retardant tanker-bombers were committed to the fire. Some dropped their swathes of red chemicals on the blaze last evening, and two bombers and four helicopters swooped over the ridges this morning.

The fire lighted the night skies

red and could be seen for tens of miles around.

Fire fighters worked with pump-trucks, picks and shovels to protect homes outside the bulldozed fire break.

No serious injuries were reported.

Jennie Brammeyer and her mother, Mrs. Twila Brammeyer, saw the lightning bolts flash into the dry hills shortly before 5 p.m. as they looked out the windows of their residence on Kirker Pass Road between Clayton and Pittsburg.

They said three small spots of fires burst into flame after a light-

ning streak "hit the middle of the mountain."

Streaks of dry lightning flashing to earth without rain set off fires throughout Northern California and at other points in Contra Costa County.

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"There must be 40 or 50 fires going all over the state. Some of them are just an acre or so and we're getting them out, but others are getting out of hand," said a dispatcher at the California Division of Forestry headquarters in Sacramen-

to last night.

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Fire Threat to Rare Plants

AUG - 2 1977

At least 12 rare native plants may be endangered by the forest fire blazing through the Mt. Diablo area.

The California Native Plant Society lists six plants as very rare and another six as moderately rare among the flora of Mt. Diablo and vicinity.

These include several which grow apparently only in this area. If the local plant population is burned off, the plant may then be extinct.

Among them are the Mt. Diablo manzanita (*Arctostaphylos auriculata*), Diablo helianthella (*Helianthella castanea*), Mt. Diablo phacelia (*Perideridia phacelioides*) and Mt. Diablo jewel flower (*Stipa hispidus*).

Also included on the society's inventory of rare and endangered plants are the "birds on nest" (*Cordylanthus nidularius*), Contra Costa eriogonum (*Eriogonum truncatum*), Santa Cruz tarweed (*Holocarpha macradenia*), Northern California black walnut (*Juglans hindsii*), rock sanicle (*Sanicula saxatilis*), caper-fruited tropidocarpum (*Tropidocarpum caparideum*), brewer dwarf flax (*Hesperolinon breweri*) and California hibiscus (*Hibiscus californicus*).

See-Saw Struggle Continues

Fire 1200
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AUG - 3 1977

Eight tanker planes took to the sky at dawn today to resume the aerial fight against the tenacious fire on Mt. Diablo, the 3,849-foot peak in central Contra Costa County, which has charred 4,550 acres so far.

Some 600 fire fighters and 120 pieces of equipment were battling the flames on the ground as the air effort began with daylight.

The fire, which was touched off Monday night by bolts of lightning,

More on Fire, Page 5

was said to be 60 per cent contained at 6 a.m. and fire control headquarters predicted 100 per cent containment for 6 p.m. today.

Early today the fire was still raging on the southeast side of the mountain, most of which is part of a state park. A spokeswoman at headquarters said no structures were in danger presently.

Firefighters gained some and then lost ground during the night as fickle winds and other weather factors refused to be loyal to one side or the other.

At sunset yesterday, miles of farmland lay under an eerie orange haze as thick billows of smoke poured upward from the mountain's northern slope.

By 11 p.m. headquarters was saying that the fire was 70 per cent contained. But by daybreak the figure was back at 60 per cent.

Late yesterday afternoon, two changes of weather combined to jeopardize the fire-fighting strategy that cut a 13-mile firebreak around the base of Mt. Diablo.

First, winds which gusted over 30 miles an hour sent fierce eddies up to the summit, making it impossible to predict the fire's direction.

Then, heavy moisture-laden marine air came in from the Bay and pushed the flames down into canyons.

Homes in Russellman Park were threatened at 4:30 p.m. when the winds changed. Ground crews using 30 pieces of equipment contained the grass and heavy brush fire.

Earlier, 40 firefighters and 15 engines were forced to retreat from a fire they were battling near the PG&E repeater station and televi-

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sion and radio transmission towers on the south slope of Mt. Diablo by a flareup.

Airplanes dropped chemical retardants and diminished the fire enough to allow ground crews to return.

Radio equipment belonging to the California Department of Forestry was saved along with equipment used by the California Highway Patrol and the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office.

By sunset yesterday, an estimated 80,000 gallons of chemical retardant had been dropped by air tankers assigned to the fire. Exhausted pilots took a break at day's end yesterday because of a seven-hour flying limit.

Early today, a spokeswoman at fire headquarters said the major problem for the ground crews during the night was when the flames jumped fire lines at about 12 places in Mitchell Canyon on the northwest side of the mountain.

Pacific Telephone reported that it had lost commercial power for telephones at the summit at about 1:28 a.m. and had to switch to emergency power.

Another problem, the spokeswoman said, was the number of volunteers who showed up at fire headquarters during the night. No volun-

teers have been requested or will be used, she added, because of the hazard of using untrained personnel.

Fire fighters on the scene are from the Consolidated Fire District in central Contra Costa, the California Department of Forestry (CDF), the Marsh Creek Fire Department, the Riverview Fire Protection District, the Danville Fire Department, the Rodeo Fire Department and the state Office of Emergency Services.

The only injury reported so far is a case of heat exhaustion suffered by a fireman Monday night.

Yesterday, state fire officials met in emergency session in Sacramento to decide how to distribute limited firefighting resources to combat more than 300 fires in Northern California. CDF spokesman Harry Harp said it was decided to send air tankers in support of ground crews only when life or property were immediately threatened or in initial attacks on fires which had just begun.

Thousands of acres of prime forest land has been burned throughout California since the violent electrical storm unleashed its fury on the water-starved state.

Fire fighters from two Southern California counties are the nucleus of an emergency task force that has joined the battle against the fires in the upper half of the state.

About 30 firemen from San Bernardino and Riverside counties boarded military transport planes in Ontario early today to begin a major airlift operation by CDF in hopes of stemming the state's raging fires.

The department also has canceled all vacations to provide maximum personnel on the fire lines.

Besides the fire on Mt. Diablo, a major problem is in the Big Sur area where two separate fires have black-

ened more than 700 acres and firemen are still on the scene.

"It's looking very bad up there as far as manpower and equipment are concerned," admitted CDF spokesman Jim Hunter. "This initial order for the emergency help is probably only the beginning. With the exception of the deadly Santa Ana wind condition in Southern California, this is about as bad as you'll ever see it."

Another fire sparked by lightning yesterday burned about 800 acres of brush and timber in the Sequoia National Forest, 60 miles northeast of Bakersfield.

No injuries were reported and no structures were in danger, according to officials.

In the Sierra National Forest east of Fresno, eight smaller lightning-caused fires were burning east of Huntington Lake and Kaiser Ridge.

In Southern California, the 2,000-acre Cachuma fire near Santa Barbara was declared contained last night.

More than 500 acres of timber and brush burned near Mt. Shasta in Siskiyou County.

Diablo Checked; Big Sur Ablaze

Fire forest
By LANCE WILLIAMS

cc
AUG - 4 1977

Bone-weary fire fighters early this morning managed to clamp a ring around the troublesome Mt. Diablo fire, and officials said they are confident that the 6,000-acre blaze will be extinguished today, three days after it began.

Meanwhile, more than 400 other forest fires raged across the state as

an 18,000-acre blaze in the Marble Peak area of the Los Padres National Forest.

a result of recent lightning strikes in dry forests. The worst is a 30,000-acre wildfire that is roaring unchecked through the Ventana Wilderness area of the Los Padres National Forest and blackening the skies above the Big Sur coast.

On Mt. Diablo the big break came shortly after midnight today, when the 300 fire fighters from the California Division of Forestry managed

the last forest fire 30 years ago.

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to establish a fire line that contained the blaze within a 10-mile perimeter. Their success in keeping the fire from jumping the line in the hours since then leads the fire fighters to believe the blaze will be controlled by 6 p.m. Nadine Robbins, fire information officer for the state Department of Forestry, explained the difference.

ment of Forestry, explained the difference.

"Contained means we have a line on the fire," she said. "Controlled means the fire is out except for a few smouldering stumps."

At its height, as many as 600 fire fighters and 120 pieces of equipment were involved in battling the blaze, which consumed major sections of

both the Mt. Diablo State Park and the adjacent state game refuge. Despite the size of the fire, only one structure was consumed by it—a ladies' outhouse at the state park—and no one was seriously hurt.

The announcement that the big fire was contained 54 hours after it started left the fire fighters relieved

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Marble Peak is contained

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but hardly encouraged, according to Dept. of Forestry Capt. Richard Hoover.

"The troops are so tired, they're just lying down," he said early today. "They know when they get up they're just going on to another one."

One possible destination would be Big Sur, where 1,400 men are fighting an 18,000-acre blaze in the Marble Peak area of the Los Padres National Forest. Nearby, according to Fire Information Officer Carol Warren, a 12,000-acre blaze is burning near the South Ventana Cone. Although the blazes are expected to combine today, she said no one is even fighting the South Cone fire.

"We have no personnel on that fire because of access," she said. "The Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits mechanized equipment in the (Ventana) wilderness area, and it's a 10-mile walk to the fire."

The main problem in fighting the Marble Peak blaze, she said, is that there is a very large amount of fuel—dead trees and underbrush—that has piled up in the area since the last forest fire 30 years ago.

"The energy that's produced (from such a fire) is just incredible," she said. "Burning 1,000 acres of this dry oak and manzanita releases the same energy released by an atomic bomb."

She said that the fire fighters

have been unable to use aircraft to fight the fire because of thick smoke. Smoke and haze from the fires has darkened skies up and down the Big Sur Coast, she said.

Also burning out of control today is a 6,000-acre forest fire in the Modoc National Forest near the Oregon border in northeastern California. Information officer Nancy Gardner said that the about 500 men are fighting this blaze, which is burning through pines 30 air miles west of the town of Canby. They need more help but can't get it, she said.

"Manpower throughout the state is almost nil," she said. "It's very difficult to bring in any more fire fighters because of all the other fires around the state."

300 Fires Raging

Mt. Diablo Mop-up

Final Found
1 AUG - 5 1977

By FRAN DAUTH *CC*

It is all over but the mopping up at Mt. Diablo where lightning kindled a fire Monday night which eventually charred 6,100 acres and took three days to subdue.

State Department of Forestry officials said today that mop-up crews would remain on the scene—which includes the state park on top of the 3,849-foot peak—for at least another week.

The next job will be erosion control which is likely to cost the taxpayers as much as \$1.2 million, the state has estimated.

Mt. Diablo State Park is closed until further notice.

Elsewhere today, more than 8,000 men, including nearly 3,500 U.S. Forest Service fire fighters from 48 other states, were scattered across Northern California battling nearly 300 raging timber and brush fires.

About 2,000 men were fighting a

32,000-acre blaze in the Ventana Wilderness of Los Padres National Forest, near Big Sur, according to the California Department of Forestry (CDF).

That fire, like the one on Mt. Diablo and nearly all the others in the state, was sparked by lightning storms which plagued the state most of this week.

The Ventana fire is threatening structures at the small community of Tassajara Hot Springs, evacuated earlier this week, and a forest ranger station at Chews Ridge. The fire is more than 20 miles long.

The 20,000-acre Scarface fire near Canby in Modoc County also is burning out of control.

Other fires in the Modoc-Lassen area in northeastern California include an 8,000-acre blaze near the town of Bieber, the 6,000-acre Ponds timber fire, a 7,000-acre fire near Mosquito Lake, a 1,600-acre fire near Egg Lake and at least 15 other

fires from one to 400 acres in size.

A 3,000-acre timber fire near Eagle Lake is a potential threat to 50 to 75 homes in the Forest Lakes subdivision near Susanville.

A 1,500-acre timber fire in the Plumas National Forest is being fought by more than 700 men.

A new brush fire broke out yesterday in rugged hills eight miles north of Santa Barbara, where a raging blaze last week burned 256 homes.

About 100 fire fighters—half of them pulled off the nearby Lake Cachuma blaze—were battling the fire, which had blackened five acres and burned to within a quarter-mile of the Painted Cave housing development last night.

The Lake Cachum fire was declared contained on Wednesday.

In all, more than 100,000 acres of brush and timber are burning throughout the state.

What the Fire Did ar

San Jose Mercury News
By LLOYD BOLES

AUG - 7 1977

At 5 p.m. last Monday a bolt of lightning ripped into a manzanita clump on Mt. Diablo's Eagle Peak, triggering a fire that raged mercilessly for 82 hours and 20 minutes before weary fire fighters quelled it at 3:20 a.m. Thursday.

A score of "hot spots" still smolder or burn, said Bruce Williams, fire information officer for the Santa Clara Ranger unit of the state Department of Forestry, with headquarters at Morgan Hill.

These hot spots will be mopped up by late tomorrow, said Williams, "and then the tough job of erosion control, the replanting of devastated areas, the clearing of brush

and other measures necessary to restore the natural beauty of the park will commence."

The fire destroyed about 6,000 acres of brush and trees within an irregular loop around the 3,900-foot summit, which had as its perimeter Ridge Rock, Mitchell Rock, Twin Peaks, Donner Canyon, Perkins Canyon, Rhine Canyon, Frog Pond and Pioneer.

State botanists and biologists say it is too early to tell what the total effect on the mountain's flora and fauna was, but a state spokesman said it "could be considerable." A dozen or so rare native plant species were in the path of the blaze and may have been destroyed, said Mary Bowerman, Lafayette, a student of

Destruction

and How Much It Cost

native plants, who also noted that some of the plants that were burned back to the roots only, or whose seeds were buried under the black ash, may, with normal rainfall, grow and bloom again in full glory.

Manley Inlay, biologist for the state Department of Fish and Game, said that the fire, "although it no doubt destroyed much wildlife, especially small creatures like squirrels and rabbits that can't flee like deer or bobcat, is generally beneficial for wildlife in the future."

Fire, he said, is the natural process for recycling all living things.

On the first day of the fire there was little wind. But

the blaze fed upon its own thermal balls of heat and spread in all directions. Local fire districts summoned immediate help. The state Office of Emergency Services, already geared for action because of numerous other fires burning in the state, coordinated the battle of Diablo. Soon about 650 fire fighters and 120 pieces of equipment, including eight air tankers, five helicopters and 24 bulldozers were on the fire lines.

On the second day, while the fire raged on the southeast side of Diablo, weary fire fighters optimistically reported the blaze 60 per cent contained; the figure later went up to 70 per cent. But devil winds whipped the blaze into a frenzy, the percentages dropped.

The big break came early Thursday when 300 fire fighters from the California Division of Forestry, all of them bone-weary, carved a fire line that contained the blaze within a 10-mile perimeter.

No lives were lost during the holocaust, no one was seriously injured, no structures, other than a woman's restroom, were destroyed.

Williams said the estimated state costs alone thus far total about \$2 million. This includes \$800,000 for men and equipment. The vital aerial tankers, their bellies filled with fire-retardant chemical, cost \$60,000 per day, the leased helicopters about \$200 per hour.

Damage to the watershed and park land was estimated at \$1.2 million.

Fire fighting costs from other agencies involved in the battle, including the Consolidated Fire District in central Contra Costa County, the Marsh Creek Fire Department, the Riverview Fire Protection District, the Danville Fire Department and the Rodeo Fire Department are not yet completed.

Remnants of Fire

Diablo Park Reopens

Aug 20 1977

*Fire, Forest
CC CO*

Mt. Diablo State Park, parts of which look like a battlefield with charred skeletons of trees rising from the blackened ground, opens to the public again today following the mop-up after the Aug. 1-3 fire.

About 6,000 acres of grass, brush and trees were burned in an irregular loop around the 3,900-foot summit by a lightning-caused blaze that raged for more than 80 hours before being quelled by 650 fire fighters.

Today, the red stain of fire retardant dropped from aerial tankers covers the parking lot at the summit, some of it slopped over onto the stone walls of the lookout building.

Swaths of blackened earth and charred chaparral radiate downward along the steep slopes a half mile to the south and nearly a mile to the north. Interspersed among the many branches and swirls taken by the flames are untouched vegetation, tin-

ulder

der-dry and still in danger from the drought.

"Depending upon your point of view, the fire may be considered a catastrophe or a boon to the park," said Supervising Ranger Ted Reinhardt as he viewed the blackened slopes.

Periodic burning is a natural condition, Reinhardt pointed out. Flames reduce the depth of dead and decaying plant matter that restricts natural growth. It frees the seeds buried in the underbrush to germinate and grow.

However, since the park has been protected by rangers and used by a public aware of the dangers of fire, the slopes of Mt. Diablo have not been so severely blackened since 1931, when about four times as much acreage was burned.

Reinhardt said there is little evidence of damage to the wildlife pop-

ulation of the park. Greater growth of grasses and tender shoots of bushes after the next rains begin will probably result in an increase in the park's deer population, he predicted.

The ranger warned park users planning to visit the reopened park that there are several restrictions that must be observed.

All vehicles must stay on the roads, even though the fire has made it possible to drive cross-country more easily, he said.

"And there should be no collecting of such natural objects as unusual pine cones and things now more easily observed on the ground that has been burned over," he said.

And park restrictions as to fire safety, such as a ban on fires or smoking during periods of high fire hazard, must continue to be carefully observed by the public, he said.

Chuck

Anderson

AUG 27 1977

Mt. Diablo Babble-o

Fire-scarred Mt. Diablo is "The Devil's Mountain," according to a legend popularized by Bret Harte. Maybe the demonic influence explains why the recent fire's aftermath has spurred honest differences of opinion among plant lovers, usually genial folk. Carl Wilson of Berkeley, a reader who took exception to my feelings and said so on The Trib's editorial page last Monday, wants me to modify my "ill-considered comments." I have looked more deeply into the situation since writing about the needs of Ma Nature to clear her lands with lightning-set fires. Now I am more convinced than ever.

I drove up to Diablo's peak this week. When I first came upon the blackened area which surrounds the summit, the seeming devastation



CHUCK ANDERSON

shocked me. Tall trees, killed by the intense heat, now stand as silent sentinels to the power of wildfire. The scrub brush effectively was vaporized. But a closer examination of the park exposed reasons for optimism.

The flames scorched an irregular ring surrounding the summit that extends a half-mile down the rugged terrain toward the south and nearly a mile to the north toward the town of Clayton, nearest hub of civilization. But

within this ring, bunches of living plants and trees remain to reseed and spread over the barren earth naturally.

State officials are relying on nature. Fred Meyer, the state parks official supervising restoration, said: "As far as the vegetation, nature will do a very good job. We have had fires before at Mt. Diablo and natural regeneration of grasses, shrubs and trees always takes place rather quickly. We are not going to rush right in and replant everything." However, some hand replanting of the native coulter pines, which are slow-growing, may come next year, he said. There also will be restoration of lands damaged by fire-fighting.

Mary Bowerman, an expert on native flora of Mt. Diablo, knows nature will do its job. She remembers walking across the slopes of Mt. Diablo in the spring following a devastating forest fire in 1931. She found wildflower species growing for the first time in decades. The fire had performed its natural role—clearing the forest floor of fuel while "stratifying" certain seeds that need to be exposed to high heat before they will germinate.

Most of the burned area is chaparral, a plant

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community aptly described by Claremont horticulturist Dick Tilforth in American Horticulturist magazine:

"These scrubby areas are subject to fires that are not regular or frequent but are necessary for the health of both the flora and fauna of this community. The vegetation of the community has adapted to this condition of infrequent fires and many of the dominant shrubs are able to reestablish themselves by stump-sprouting from ground-level crowns. Many of the annual seeds will not germinate until they have been subjected to the heat of the chaparral fires."

This brings us to an excellent idea advanced by Carl—"prescribed burning." A controlled burn would accomplish what nature needs. It also would avoid fuel buildup that feeds a fire until it becomes a disaster. This year's fire was bigger than necessary because man's forest fire prevention practices allowed fuel buildup.

Clayton residents, meanwhile, worry about winter mudslides. State officials are working on control of slides and "gullying"—the washing of silt downstream. Meyer said the danger to Clayton depends on how heavy the rains are this winter and whether flood control channels on that side of the mountain are wide enough to handle the water flow.